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## Terror war doesn't go to the swift / Watching and waiting are needed for success

John Arquilla

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Two world-shaking events have just demonstrated that terrorist networks are both stronger and weaker than we thought.

Hezbollah's performance in resisting Israeli tanks and planes demonstrated the strength. The arrests in London 10 days ago of two dozen suspects in a plot to blow out of the sky 10 commercial airliners headed for the United States demonstrated the terrorists' weakness.

In Lebanon, a few hundred small, self-contained teams of Hezbollah fighters successfully withstood a fierce Israeli air and ground assault. Hezbollah is remarkable, given that its network of combat teams was vastly outnumbered and outgunned by the Israeli Defense Forces. In addition, the Israelis had a lot of previous experience fighting Hezbollah to draw on, leading them to deploy spotter and hunter teams in addition to their main forces, to help smoke out the terrorists from their hiding places. Further, the Israelis went to great length to bomb or jam enemy communications.

But none of this worked. Israeli air power did little damage to Hezbollah fighters because it was so hard to find their dispersed units, whose size was limited to the number of fighters they could fit into a pickup truck. These teams would simply move from preset weapons cache to weapons cache, shooting and scooting, making tracking even harder.

Then, when Israeli ground forces advanced, Hezbollah combat teams swarmed from all directions -- summoned by one group calling out on short-range walkie-talkies. No need for the cell phone towers that the Israelis were blowing to bits: These fighters had all the communications they needed to keep resisting effectively.

Hezbollah's simple network in Lebanon drew its strength from the interconnections and coordination between its small teams, but the London terror cells became vulnerable partly because they had a much higher level of connectivity -- including co-conspirators outside Britain -- that the British authorities exploited skillfully.

Instead of detaining and interrogating the first suspects that popped up, MI5 agents waited and watched for many months -- in a few cases for years. Their patience paid big dividends, as ever more plotters were identified in Britain, along with another cell in Pakistan that it seems was working with them.

The London case suggests that, in order to defeat a network, it is necessary first to amass a great deal of information, then strike simultaneously -- just as happened in England and Pakistan 10 days ago.

There was some risk of the terrorists getting twitchy while under surveillance and trying to launch their attacks sooner. But in network warfare, or "netwar" for short, the art of the skillful strategist lies in finding just the right balance between acting too soon or too late.

Premature action in London would have led to the capture of a few operatives, but the remaining members of the cell would likely

have been able to go underground and continue with the plan. In this regard, doing damage to a network too early does little to cripple it and, perversely, may reduce the amount of knowledge regarding how its nodes function that is so desperately needed by the counterterrorist units hunting them.

So, the lessons to be drawn from Lebanon and London begin to come into focus.

First, on the battlefield, it is clear that an enemy network of dispersed militants can survive traditional air and ground operations, if not shrug them off completely. This suggests the need to develop and deploy counterterrorist teams that operate just as nimbly as their enemies.

Second, in the global manhunt for terror cells, waiting and watching for as long as possible will enable the authorities to exploit the biggest vulnerability of networks: their deep-set interconnectivity.

An appreciation of these lessons by the American military and intelligence agencies would go a long way toward improving the counterinsurgent campaign in Iraq. After more than three years of hard fighting, it is obvious that conventional military operations and aerial bombing have done little to bring the insurgency to its knees. With more than a quarter of a million Iraqis trained to fight by our forces, it is time to sharply reduce our garrison and reconfigure those troops who remain into hunter networks. Then they must be empowered with good intelligence.

In order to pull off this kind of radical shift, it will be necessary to overcome the temptation to strike swiftly as soon as reliable information develops. While immediate action based on "hot" information has led to some tactical success, more often than not it has left American forces with less knowledge about the remaining terrorist cells, as well as less intelligence regarding new cells forming or infiltrating into the country.

If only more waiting and watching were being done -- along the lines of the London case -- far more damage could be inflicted upon the terrorist cells that are trying so hard to foment a full-scale civil war in Iraq.

However clear the lessons from Lebanon and London are, putting them into effect will depend first on our leaders' willingness to jettison their emotional attachment to the application of "overwhelming force" (the Powell Doctrine) as the basic concept of field operations. Next, when it comes to the hunt for globally dispersed terror cells, we must overcome the temptation to make captures as soon as possible -- as we have done a number of times these past five years. Instead we should adopt the more patient method used by the British.

The first official American reactions to Lebanon and London do not seem to reflect an attitude of introspection. President Bush has summarily declared Israel the winner in southern Lebanon even though the Israelis have launched an inquiry into why their forces didn't do as well as hoped. And the arrests in London and Pakistan have been embraced as a validation of the methods employed these past several years rather than as a call for change.

But let's think again, for we can be sure our opponents are already analyzing the lessons of Lebanon and London.

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